
OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Lee Vasey, Leisure Services Portfolio

Responsible Director(s) - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

Purpose of Report

1. To present the Open Space Strategy, which has been subject to formal consultation, to Members for final approval.

Background

2. The strategy has been developed following the Best Practice Guidance produced by CABE Space. CABE Space is a unit within CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) that aims to bring excellence to design, management and maintenance of parks and public spaces in our towns and cities. This complements the existing Companion Guide to Planning Policy Note 17 (PPG 17: Open Space, Sport and Recreation).
3. The Open Space Strategy and related Appendices, which are attached as **Appendix 1a and 1b** have taken longer to finalise than originally anticipated, mainly due to ensuring clear links are made with the Local Development Framework and to reflect the opportunities that have arisen as part of the development of the Local Area Agreement. The Open Space Strategy covers the built up area of Darlington town and the three largest villages in the Borough (Heighington, Hurworth and Middleton St George). The land use policies that appear in the finalised version of the Open Space Strategy will be used for development control purposes and integrated into the Local Development Framework as soon as possible.
4. The smaller settlements within the Borough have not been considered as part of the Open Space Strategy as the standards for quality, quantity and accessibility are based on the main urban conurbations. The smaller rural areas enjoy significantly more open space as by their very nature, they are rural and therefore in the countryside.
5. The strategy has been developed by a Steering Group comprising:
 - (a) Ian Thompson, Assistant Director – Environmental Services
 - (b) Graham Farr, Principal Planning Officer
 - (c) Valerie Adams, Planning Officer
 - (d) Rob George, Principal Countryside and Rights of Way Officer
 - (e) Steve Thompson, Assistant Director – Leisure and Arts
 - (f) Guy Metcalfe, Estates and Property Manager
 - (g) Representative from Children’s Services
 - (h) Representative from the Primary Care Trust
 - (i) Two community representatives

6. The scope of the strategy has followed the criteria of PPG 17 typology:

- (a) Parks and gardens
- (b) Natural and semi-natural green spaces, including urban woodland
- (c) Green corridors
- (d) Open sports facilities
- (e) Amenity green space
- (f) Provision for children and young people
- (g) Allotment, community gardens and urban farms
- (h) Cemeteries, disused churchyards and other burial grounds
- (i) Civic and market squares and other hard surfaces

PPG17 also requires an audit of indoor sport and recreation facilities to be carried out but this aspect will be completed separately as part of wider work on reviewing sports and cultural provision.

7. The strategy is split into five simple sections:

- (a) Section 1 – Introduction
- (b) Section 2 – Current Situation (Where Are We Now)
- (c) Section 3 – Moving Things Forward (Where Do We Want To Be)
- (d) Section 4 – Resources and Implementation (Action Plan)
- (e) Section 5 – Monitoring and Review

8. The strategy is intended to cover the next ten years, with regular monitoring and a mid term review planned for 2012. Several of the policies contained in the strategy will feed into appropriate planning documents and will become the Council's adopted planning policies dealing with open space, until such time as local need or changes in national or regional policy indicate a change is necessary.

9. Implementation of this strategy will be driven forward by close management and monitoring of the accompanying Action Plan. Responsibility for this will lie primarily with the Council's Assistant Director - Environmental Services and will be largely achieved through the area teams set up under Street Scene, in partnership with other Council departments and the local community.

Vision and Aims

10. The vision for the Open Space Strategy is:

To provide, protect and enhance a variety of high quality, accessible open green spaces throughout the Borough, linking with the cultural and natural heritage of the area that are:

- (a) *Well designed and maintained*
- (b) *Sustainable*
- (c) *Safe*

(d) Promote health, well being and enjoyment

improving the quality of life for residents and visitors to the Borough”

11. The aims of the strategy are:

- (a) To provide a sustainable amount of high quality, accessible open space across the Borough to meet the changing needs and expectations of local people, now and for the foreseeable future.
- (b) To provide a variety of open spaces and facilities with unrestricted access that where appropriate, are equally accessible by all.
- (c) To secure improvements in the design and management of open spaces so that they are attractive and safe for everyone, enhance recreational biodiversity and aesthetic quality and conserve the Borough’s distinctive history and culture.
- (d) To build and sustain strong relationships with the local community and other agencies to help improve and shape change on open spaces.

Key Issues

12. The key issues addressed by the strategy are:

- (a) Maintaining the amount of open space that people want to the quality that the community has come to expect.
- (b) Poor levels of provision in several parts of the town often coincide with areas of greatest need in terms of lack of private open space, poor health and low mobility.
- (c) Marked differences in the quality of local open spaces, generally, depending on where you live.
- (d) A minority of sites not positively contributing to local quality of life and amenity.
- (e) Geographical gaps in the provision of specific types of open space.
- (f) Limited maintenance and management suppressing the potential of too many high value sites.
- (g) Poor quality particularly for semi-natural and natural green spaces and informal recreation sites.
- (h) The impact that public access or otherwise to school playing fields can have on the overall levels of accessible open space.
- (i) Any accessibility issues arising from the concentration of certain types of open space in certain parts of the town.
- (j) Capitalising on the biodiversity potential of the entire open space resource.

- (k) Lost opportunities for open space provision and enhancement in association with new development.
- (l) The evolving open space needs of an ageing population.
- (m) Planning for future burial provision.
- (n) Protection and enhancement of open spaces within villages.
- (o) The need to dispose of surplus open spaces to help maintain a sustainable level of funding for open space.

Consultation

13. A significant amount of consultation and research has taken place to produce the draft strategy, including:

- (a) An open space audit of 300 sites that was carried out during 2004/2005.
- (b) Public consultation, including views expressed about open spaces during community engagement on other strategies, e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.
- (c) 1,000 sample telephone survey of Borough households and engagement event organised for young people in late 2003.
- (d) Open spaces were debated by Darlington Assembly in summer 2005.
- (e) Demographic information.
- (f) Planning policy.
- (g) Other plans and strategies impacting on the Open Space Strategy, e.g. the Community Strategy.
- (h) National policy, advice and best practice.
- (i) Service delivery arrangements introduced as part of Street Scene.

14. Following production of the draft strategy, further extensive consultation took place on the draft strategy as follows:

- (a) Statutory consultations with bodies such as Sport England, English Nature, English Heritage, the Environment Agency and the Countryside Agency
- (b) Darlington Partnership and the Community Partnerships
- (c) Parish Councils

- (d) Interest groups such as Darlington Civic Trust, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and Darlington Association for Disability
 - (e) Community Associations, Friends Groups and the Allotment Associations
 - (f) Environment Forum and Planning Forum
 - (g) Groundwork West Durham and Darlington, and Tees Forest
 - (h) Local young people's groups
 - (i) Residents who have already participated in consultation programme
 - (j) Member Briefing Sessions
 - (k) Editorial and adverts in Town Crier and other publications
15. In addition to the above, two drop in events will be arranged for residents to discuss the strategy with officers and an invitation to comment will be publicised in the Town Crier and other local media.
16. As the policies within the Open Space Strategy will be carried forward into the Local Development Framework, a Sustainability Appraisal will be carried out on the Open Space Strategy, with its findings feeding into the final version.
17. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the strategy and appropriate recommendations included in the final document.
18. Attached as **Appendix 2** is the consultation responses to the draft strategy, which have been incorporated where appropriate.

Financial Implications

19. The resources for realising the vision and associated action plans will be drawn from several sources. There is £1.5 million of capital and additional revenue available through the Local Area Agreement for physical improvements and community engagement for environmental projects. The Council will also use its own capital programme to supplement this and as the opportunities arise, would bid for additional capital resources from the Big Lottery Fund. Open spaces that are of low value and are not required to meet any identified needs will be considered for disposal, with any money raised from sales potentially used to support the management and maintenance of remaining valued open spaces. Financial contributions will also be secured from private developers for the provision, maintenance and enhancement of open spaces in association with new housing in the area.

20. Apart from the Local Area Agreement funding which is secured, the other financial resources for realising the strategy's vision and implementing the associated action plan are likely to vary throughout the life of the strategy. This will depend on other pressures on the Council's own resources, the amount of new development that comes forward and the varying nature of programmes that the Big Lottery and other external grant regimes support. For these reasons, the achievement of the strategy's aims is seen as a long-term objective with delivery of projects over the short to medium term likely to fluctuate according to the availability of resources on an annual basis.

Legal Implications

21. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

22. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.

23. The Open Space Strategy is all about protecting, enhancing and maintaining a range of open spaces throughout the Borough, which will have a major impact on crime and anti social behaviour. It is anticipated that by involving the community and young people, particularly in the design, implementation and maintenance of a programme of improvements, community ownership and pride in local neighbourhoods will be achieved and a positive impact on crime and disorder achieved.

Council Policy Framework

24. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

25. The Open Space Strategy has been developed by a multi-departmental steering group involving community representation. A significant amount of community consultation took place for the production of the draft strategy, which subsequently went out for wider consultation as detailed in this report.

26. A sustainability appraisal and equalities impact assessment have also been carried out on the draft strategy and appropriate recommendations from those assessments have been included in the final strategy.

Recommendation

27. Council are requested to adopt the Open Space Strategy, which covers a ten-year period from 2007 through to 2017.

Reasons

28. To enable the Open Space Strategy and action plans to be implemented.

Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services

Background Papers

Background papers are referenced within the Open Space Strategy document (**Appendix 1**).

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CLD